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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 3, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "POSTURE IN HOUSEWORK." Information from the Extension Service,
United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Friends, please make allowance for my Scotch accent this morning while
I quote from Robert Burns:

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us!"

It's generally done with mirros, nowadays- long ones, often made part
of a closet door, or full length mirrors on a stand, that used to be called
"pier-glasses." I was forcibly reminded of Burns' famous lines this morning
because I happened to glance sideways at myself in a long glass in a store
window as I walked to the studio. I can tell you that what I saw made me
throw my shoulders back and tilt my chin up before anybody else should notice
how I was slouching.

"Correct posture from now on," I said to myself firmly. And that was
how I came to look over some of the extension reports that I have on file to
see what was being done about posture among rural women.

If you think posture doesn't matter, I'd like to say right here that a
good many industrial firms think it does. Some of them have for years studied
the relation between the size of the individual worker and the machinery or
tools or type of job under way. In many cases this included a study of the
height of the working surfaces at which the worker's output was best, posture
most comfortable, and fatigue least. Perhaps industry was not wholly disin-
terested in such studies. But following this lead, extension workers have
been doing much to make farm women more conscious of the relation between bad
posture in doing their housework and resulting fatigue or actual strain. To say
nothing of how they gradually came to look, or the amount of time they consumed
needlessly over work that could be better done if the working position were
better.

I found plenty of evidence that rural women and girls were deeply inter-
ested in the whole subject of posture. Alabama reports state that in one year,
1936, 12,645 farm women improved their posture as a result of the attention
given to the subject in their home demonstration meetings. In Virginia, in
the same year, 1931 Four-H Club girls bettered their posture, as did a large
number of Connecticut club members. Club girls in Missouri combined posture
study with their dress revue, believing that the way clothes are worn had much
to do with their appearance. Older club members in Missouri made posture a part
of their health project.

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In some States posture is a project by itself, or it may be related to some other program as in Missouri. Frequently it is tied in with a foot hygiene or shoe selection project, as in Illinois, New Mexico, and Oregon. Nevada extension workers included good posture in the "Keep Growing" project which has been emphasized for several years. In New York State, posture is part of the general subject of good grooming. In Tennessee, posture was discussed at practically every women's home demonstration club meeting in 1936. So you see the subject is of interest in all parts of the country.

A full-length mirror is a great help in studying our posture in certain positions and some kinds of work, but even without one we can check posture in each of our tasks. I can give you the "giftie" to "see yourself as others see you" if you'll just get a sheet of paper and do a little sketching.

You say you can't draw? This will be very simple. First, make a straight vertical line about 2 inches long. Next, attach two straight lines about the same length for legs, marking knee joints. A circle on top for the head, and two lines for arms make you complete. Yes, you. This little figure is meant to represent yourself.

Now you're going to pretend that you are doing different household tasks- washing dishes, washing clothes, ironing, baking, preparing vegetables, waxing or mopping floors, washing windows, hanging out the clothes, emptying garbage, or any others you can think of. Make your own list. What you are to do when you have time is to "see yourself" as others see you" by sketching your own figure in the position it takes in each of these tasks.

Consider washing clothes, for example. Does your little sketch show that when you do the laundry, you stoop over the tub so that the line of your back is a curve instead of being straight? How about raising the wash-bench by means of blocks until the height of the tub is comfortable, and any bending can be done from the hips?

You remember our talk last week about the height of working surfaces. The first thing to do in correcting bad posture is to look at the height of the ironing board, sink, table, and any other kitchen surfaces that might be adjusted. When you hang out clothes, do you save energy and keep good posture by setting the basket on a child's cart or the lower part of an old baby buggy?

The length of the handle on a broom, a floor-mop, waxing brick, or dust-pan determines whether you will have good posture as you work at these tasks. Short handles cause you to bend over. It has been proved scientifically that bending requires 55 percent more energy than lying down. Kneeling on the floor to scrub or oil it also uses more energy than working with a long-handled tool and puts the worker in a poor posture.

Next to lying down- which is hardly the way to do housework!- sitting takes the least energy of any position in which you can work. So why not sit at your labors as often as you can? Adjust the height of your ironing board and your kitchen stool for sitting. You'll be surprised and pleased at the saving in energy and the lessening of fatigue at the end of the day. Sit down to pare vegetables, too,- only be sure your sitting posture is correct, with the base of the spine well-back in the chair and your back straight. Don't sit in the position my grandmother used to call "lolling". That will never help your posture!
